For your info. He doesn't know I sent. Did he send you his memo? Pretty bad. I didn't anticipate this long a letter, but I didn't spend much time on it. I don't think it will have much effect on him, probably negative, judging from experience. HR

4/21/73

Dear Ross, (Ralston)

Thank you for sending me your memo on the assassination. I have several critical comments to make about it and your approach in general. I hope you will not regard this letter as arrogant, for I do not intend it to be. I also hope you will not think I am against "finding the truth" or that I favor suppressing evidence, for neither is true, but the comments I am about to make have been made before with those exact criticisms levied.

I"ll start with your "COMMENT" at the end of your memo. I disagree with just about everything in that. I have long been wary of any talk about "finding the truth" or "understanding what happened on Nov 22." We are at a stage now where we know just about all that we can possibly know about what happened based on the available evidence. All that's really left to be picked up from the available evidence is sheer window-dressing. There's no way we can possibly know exactly how many shots were fired, from where, by who, etc. And what's the point in knowing that anyway, except to satisfy a personal curiosity. Can there be any doubt from what we now know that there had to be more than one gunman, from more than one location? Can the Zapruder film leave any doubt of a shot from the front? Most questions about what happened that day are of the past; they are no longer important. Garrison aside, we're never going to know the identities of the gunmen, and I doubt if we'll ever know the details of the plot. We certainly won't find them in the 26 volumes, or even the Archives. The government never investigated the case--you've got to realize that. They compiled a ton of materials about the man who didn't fire the shots, the gun that wasn't used, the trajectories from which no shots were fired, etc. But there was never an official investigation into what really happened.

I have had too much association with other critics to hold "the free flow of information" as a great value and most certainly not an attainable value. This is the reality, and I've got to deal with it. Face it--there are a lot of crooks and dishonest people working on this. There are also many dedicated and well-wishing ones who are irresponsible and incompetant. On that basis alone, I don't approve of passing one's own research to "critics" at random unless one publishes that work, in which case it is legally available. I even have reservations on publishing. Publishing inconsequential monographs and small pieces in obscure magazines can do us no good at this point and can serve to hurt us. These things are seen only by a handful of "us," which utterly removes any real justification for publishing in the first place, and they also alert people with an interest to protect and enable them to prepare and offer spurious defenses which, whether we like it or not, are given far more credence and coverage in the press than the articles which inspired them. I do believe that constructive ends can be served by certain types of publication, as in the case of a book, and as you probably know, I am currently trying to have my book published.

I'm going to be perfectly frank with you about the substance of your memo, and I urge you to take my comments constructively, as they are meant. In general, your memo is a pretty good example of the kind of things I've been talking about. Topic 1, on Givens, really adds nothing to what we've long known, that Givens was lying about seeing Oswald. This was apparent from Sylvia's book. Her piece in the Observer provided additional documentation which was irrefutable but still, it didn't add anything to the essence of what was already established. As for your point on Givens' jacket, you

are not really justified in drawing the inference you do until you have a complete accounting of what Givens did with his jacket during the whole day, with no lapses, as there are in his testimony. However, the whole point is so minor that I hardly think it worth the time.

There is nothing new in your Tippit "reconstruction," and as I hope you realize, there is no evidence to prove that there was a second gunman or even an accomplice. The real importance of the evidence of the Wrights and others is that the givernment suppressed that evidence or simply failed to develop it. As for the ballistics evidence in that, because of the state of the bullets, nobady can say anything about which gun they came from, so to quote Cunningham about the possibility that they were fired from multiple guns is not evidence in support of the theory that there were two assailants. I strongly feel we have to refrain from offering such reconstructions, because there is no evidence to back them and they provide fertile grounds for attacking our credbility.

Because of my own work, I especially resent your topic, "Oswald's Role." I assume that the absolute statements you make in that section are merely speculation. Whatever, they are quite unjustified. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that Oswald was a "lookout," and there was really no need for a lookout. Also, you merely assume that there was a gunman in the TSBD--I do not think that assumption is justified. The most telling point is this: If Oswald were a lookout stationed at the rear of the TSBD, what was he doing walking up to the second floor to the lunchroom there to get a coke immediately after the shots were fired? Also, Oswald did not have to be part of the plot for the plotters to have "acess" to the house in Irving. The Paines apparently didn't take too much precaution for the security of their home. They left the police there alone on Saturday during the search.

I wonder about your familiarity with the evidence based on part two of your sixth Topic. Based on what Weisberg and Sylvia Meagher have written about the palmprint, there can be little doubt that it was not genuine. It's very doubtful to begin with whether the rifle could hold prints at all because of the nature of its surface. I forget the story of how the print was supposedly lifted--I remember that Day's story doesn't hold up. But the most telling thing is that there were no traces of the print or of its lifting left on the rifle when the FBI got the rifle, and that is impossible if the print had ever been on the rifle in the first place.

I'm not really sure what to say in closing. If I make it sound that you or I can do nothing of value in the case, that is partially true at this point. The real work to be done is largely above us now, like court work. However, if you are to continue the type of work in which you are engaged, I'd make some recommendations: First, avoid the type of speculation in your memo. Second, know the evidence and what's been written on it; keep yourself refreshed by going back to the original books. I think you should also be discriminating in who you correspond with and to whom you distribute your work. You might also do more constructive work if you changed your focus somewhat, so that you are more concerned not with the details of "what happened" but rather with the nature of the government's investigation, how it was conducted, what was and wasn't investigated and the implications of that.

Best wishes,

Howard Roffman